

CRITICISM

DRAWER 2 MRS. A. LINCOLN - FIRST LADY

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Mary Todd Lincoln

Criticism

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

This letter critical of Mary Todd
Original owned by John Gemmill
Yacktown Heights, N.Y.
R.F.D. #2

July 24. 1864
Home

Cousin Marie

Again I find myself
seated at my desk writing to
you in answer to your welcome
letter of the 4th inst. written that
day though not received until
5th. I should have thought
Cousin you would have been
more patriotic than that and
instead of writing been celebrating
our natal day. I did better or
worse I do not know which you
would call it for the celebration
lasted with most of the Quaker
street young people until the next

day about sunrise that is before
we returned

What a sickly lot you must
have had there, all sick

I have no doubt Uncle Robert
enjoyed himself here very much

At least that is what Em & I
suppose for since he came here
we have been trying to learn
to say Aunt Lucy Ann

When you write your Father told you
some Duaneburgh news I wonder
if he told all I don't understand
what you mean when you write
"Mary Frank Gage is as nice as ever"

I know just what I mean when I
say Fremont forever I believe in
having a man at the head of the
Nation worthy and capable of the
honorable position A man that
is a man in more than the simple

sense of growth or age. A man
with an iron will one who knows
it is yielding to the would be destroy-
ers of our National Existence

One who will not listen to that Conserv-
ative diplomatist Seward or be
induced to give up or postpone
some National good because

Fernando Wood Gov Seymour &
men of like stamp talk largely
of what they will do. We want a
man there whose wife we can trust
and ^{who} will ^{not} have faith in Jessie

Benton Fremont - while who can
have faith in Mrs Abraham Lincoln
it is man rule the world more than
the men though it is done silently

It is not Abraham Lincoln that is
Pres but his wife. I do really believe
that her influence has caused us many
thousands of lives and millions of dollars

I am at Em's and she sends
her respects to all. It is Sunday.
If you suppose that with all her
relations in the South east of them
holding positions in the Army that
she will not ~~be~~ ^{be} ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~the~~ ^{the} ~~army~~ ^{army} ~~with~~ ^{with} ~~and~~ ^{and}
use her influence for them

There are some women to be sure those
of the "manor boys" who would not stoop
to consider a few but would rise
high enough and have enough
native nobility to look to the good
of the many. Then I say give us

John C. Fremont - & Jessie B. Fremont
for the next four years and the Nation
will pass from increasing wrath to
the tranquillity of peaceful parents
I for one believe in a vigorous war instead
of calling for 50,000 men why not call for
a million we have got to strike deep and
terrible blows to crush this accursed rebellion
better do it now than later

Good by. Antoon *A. B. Lins.*

2/2/45

4-12-45 Daily News

New York Day by Day

By Charles B. Driscoll

NEW YORK.—Diary: Reading in various biographies of Abraham Lincoln, who was born 136 years ago today. Did you know that Lincoln had an insane wife, who was a very great trial to him throughout his term of office, who had crazy notions about spending money which nearly cost the Boss his political career, and that her own son eventually put her away in an institution for the insane? . . . No discredit here, to anybody, but it is interesting, looking back through the mist of time, to realize that this man, Lincoln, whom most Americans practically worship, was annoyed and worried to the verge of despair, while the whole trouble of Civil War was upon him by an insane wife. . . . I have never been a Lincoln-worshipper, by the way I see him as a good politician, a fair statesman, a bad war strategist, and quite a lot of a showman. . . . There is nothing derogatory about the word showman. Those who remember Will Rogers in the flesh will perhaps understand when I say that I think Lincoln and Rogers had much in common in their showmanship. . . . Our present Commander-in-chief is a superb showman, in another genre, if you want to go high-brow. . . . Where Lincoln and Rogers staged themselves as rugged pioneers, which, indeed, they were, our present Commander-in-chief masterfully stages himself as a flower of rich, millionaire, Harvard American culture, knowing nothing of the ways of his famous relative, who wrote "The Winning of the West" . . . He speaks, in public broadcasts, of his British schoolmaster, who taught him his Americanism in an expensive private school, reserved for the children of American millionaires. He is proud of this, and nobody by his name, so they say, has ever attended a mere public school. . . . Lincoln made equal dramatic capital out of the story that he had practically no schooling, did his sums in front of the fireplace on a piece of soft wood, and got his education out of the

Bible . . . Lincoln, by the way, never called himself Commander-in-chief. . . . Maybe that was one of his honorary titles he had never heard about. . . . and it may interest many to know that one of Lincoln's crosses was his wife's insistence that their son be given a bullet-proof job in the war. Of course, a President's son can have any rank he wants, as we of today know only too well. Lincoln refused to make his son a general, but he did make him an aid to a general, which was all the same, so far as the bullets were concerned. The President was humiliated, and perhaps the son was also, according to the story as it now comes down to us through our best biographers, but there was a little more time for considering national problems, after Mrs. Lincoln was satisfied that her darling boy wasn't going to be shot. . . . and which of us blames any parent for wishing for the safety of his or her own child? The only thing is, those in authority, who make war and peace, owe an obligation of courage to the rest of us. . . . and Lincoln felt that, and was sad some more. . . . There was plenty for him to be sad about, as I read the story. . . . In this situation I often think of my friend, Joseph Patrick Kennedy, once ambassador to England, who worked hard to keep this country out of the war. He had a large family, and every one went for the most dangerous service available, when war came, despite Dad's labors. . . . One son and one son-in-law have been killed, as this is written. The others are out there, watching the stuff come over. . . . and J. P. K. has many a watchful night, thinking, "Well, it was my love of peace that caused them to go for the dangerous posts." But he wasn't the kind of man to try to stop them, or to try to pull wires to keep them safe. . . . Well, what do we know, anyway, in this turgid world? Only that men are men, and courage is still a jewel that is cherished in the heart of man.

Gen. Badeau Throws Some Light on Mrs. Lincoln's Eccentricities—Her Ungovernable Rage Aroused by Trifles—Strange Insults to Mrs. Ord, Mrs. Grant and Others—Lincoln's Bearing Through It All.

The account of Lincoln's love-making in his history by Nicolay and Hay seems almost ominous when read by the light of later knowledge. The anxieties and forebodings and absolute agony of the future President, on the eve of marriage, the most incredulous might say, presaged the destiny that impended. For no one knows the character of Abraham Lincoln, his godlike patience, his ineffable sweetness, his transcendent charity amid all the tremendous worries of war and revolution and public affairs, who is ignorant of what he endured of private woe, and no one rightly judges the unfortunate partner of his elevation and unwitting cause of many of his miseries, who forgets that she had "eaten on the insane root that takes the reason prisoner."



MRS. LINCOLN.

The country knows, but has preferred to forget, the strangeness of Mrs. Lincoln's conduct at intervals after her husband's death. Many of the most extraordinary incidents in her career were not revealed, out of delicacy to others and tenderness to one who had been the sharer of Abraham Lincoln's fortunes, and the mother of his family; but enough was apparent to shock and pain the public sense, when finally the conflict with her own son, so highly respected, the dragging of their affairs into a public court, the necessary supervision of the poor lady's finances and restraint of her actions, if not of her person, disclosed the fact that her mind had been diseased.

This threw a light on circumstances until then inexplicable. It relieved Mrs. Lincoln herself from the charge of heartlessness, of mercenary behavior, of indifference to her husband's happiness; it approved the action of the son which, in some quarters, had been gravely misunderstood and, above all, it showed the suffering Abraham Lincoln must have endured all through those years in which he bore the burden of a struggling nation upon his shoulders—whether he knew or only feared the truth or whether he went on calmly in the sad thought that his saddest forebodings before the marriage were fulfilled.

The first time that I saw Mrs. Lincoln was when I accompanied Mrs. Grant to the White House, for her first visit there as the wife of the General-in-Chief. The next that I now recall was in March, 1864, when Mrs. Lincoln, with the President, visited City Point. They went on a steamer, escorted by a naval vessel of which Capt. John S. Barnes was in command, and remained for some weeks in the James River under the bluff on which

the headquarters were established. Here they slept and usually took their meals, but sometimes both ascended the hill and were entertained at the mess of Gen. Grant.

On the 28th of March a distinguished party from Washington joined them, among whom I remember especially Mr. Geoffroi, the French Minister. It was proposed that an excursion should be made to the front of the Army of the Potomac, about ten or twelve miles away, and Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant were of the company. There was a military railroad, which took the illustrious guests a great portion of the way, and then the men were mounted, but Mrs. Grant and Mrs. Lincoln went on in an ambulance, as it was called—a sort of half-open carriage with two seats besides that for the driver. I was detailed to escort them, and of course sat on the front seat facing the ladies, with my back to the horses.

In the course of conversation I mentioned that all the wives of officers at the army front had been ordered to the rear—a sure sign that active operations were in contemplation. I said not a lady had been allowed to remain, except Mrs. Griffin, the wife of Gen. Charles Griffin, who had obtained a special permission from the President. At this Mrs. Lincoln was up in arms. "What do you mean by that, sir?" she exclaimed. "Do you mean to say that she saw the President alone? Do you know that I never allow the President to see any woman alone?" She was absolutely jealous of poor, ugly Abraham Lincoln. I tried to pacify her and to palliate my remark, but she was fairly boiling over with rage. "That's a very equivocal smile, sir," she exclaimed. "Let me out of this carriage at once. I will ask the President if he saw that woman alone." Mrs. Griffin was one of the best known and most elegant women in Washington, afterwards the Countess Esterhazy, a Carroll and a personal acquaintance of Mrs. Grant, who strove to mollify the excited spouse, but in vain. Mrs. Lincoln again bade me stop the driver, and when I hesitated to obey she thrust her arms past me to the front of the carriage and held the driver fast. But Mrs. Grant finally prevailed on her to wait till the whole party alighted, and then Gen. Meade came up to pay his respects to the wife of the President. I had intended to offer Mrs. Lincoln my arm and endeavor to prevent a scene, but Meade, of course, as my superior, had the right to escort her, and I had no choice but to warn him. I saw them go off together, and remained in fear and trembling for what might occur in the presence of the foreign Minister and other important strangers.

But Gen. Meade was very adroit, and when they returned Mrs. Lincoln looked at me significantly and said: "Gen. Meade is a gentleman, sir. He says it was not the President who gave Mrs. Griffin the permit, but the Secretary of War." Meade was the son of a diplomatist and had evidently inherited some of his father's skill.

At night, when we were back in camp, Mrs. Grant talked over the matter with me and said the whole affair was so distressing and mortifying that we must never either mention it to any one; at least, I was to be absolutely silent, and she would disclose it only to the General. But the next day I was released from my pledge, for "worse remained behind."

The same party went in the morning to visit the Army of the James on the north side of the river, commanded by Gen. Ord. The arrangements were somewhat similar to those of the day before. We went up the river in a steamer, and then the men again took horses and Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant went in an ambulance. I was detailed as before to act as escort, but I asked for a companion in the duty; for after my experience of the previous day I did not wish to be the only officer in the carriage. So Gen. Horace Porter was ordered to join the party. Mrs. Ord was with her husband. As she was the wife of the commander of an army she was not subject to the order for return, though before that day was over she wished herself in Washington or anywhere else away from the army, I am sure. She was mounted, and as the ambulance was full, she remained on her horse and rode for awhile by the side of the President, and ahead of Mrs. Lincoln.

As soon as Mrs. Lincoln discovered this her rage was beyond all bounds. "What does the woman mean," she exclaimed, "by riding by the side of the President and ahead of me? Does she suppose that he wants her by the side of him?" She was in a frenzy of excitement, and language and action both became more extravagant every moment. Mrs. Grant again endeavored to pacify her, but then Mrs. Lincoln got angry with Mrs. Grant, and all that Porter and I could do was to see that nothing worse than words occurred. We feared she might jump out of the vehicle and shout to the cavalcade. Once she said to Mrs. Grant in her transports: "I suppose you think you'll get to the White House yourself, don't you?" Mrs. Grant was very calm and dignified, and merely replied that she was quite satisfied with her present position; it was far greater than she had ever expected to attain. Then Mrs. Lincoln exclaimed: "Oh! you had better take it if you can get it. 'Tis very nice." Then she returned to Mrs. Ord, but Mrs. Grant defended her friend at the risk of arousing greater vehemence.

Once when there was a halt, Major Seward, a

nephew of the Secretary of State and an officer of Gen. Ord's staff, rode up, and trying to say something jocular, remarked: "The President's horse is very gallant, Mrs. Lincoln; he insists on riding by the side of Mrs. Ord." This of course added fuel to the flame. "What do you mean by that, sir?" she cried. Seward discovered that he had made a grave mistake, and his horse at once developed a peculiarity that compelled him to ride behind, to get out of the way of the storm.

Finally the party arrived at its destination, and Mrs. Ord came up to the ambulance. Then Mrs. Lincoln positively insulted her, called her vile names in the presence of a crowd of officers, and asked what she meant by following up the President. The poor woman burst into tears and inquired what she had done, but Mrs. Lincoln refused to be appeased, and stormed till she was tired. Mrs. Grant still tried to stand by her friend, and everybody was shocked and horrified. But all things come to an end, and after a while we returned to City Point.

That night the President and Mrs. Lincoln entertained Gen. and Mrs. Grant and the General's staff at dinner on the steamer, and before us all Mrs. Lincoln berated Gen. Ord to the President and urged that he should be removed. He was unfit for his place, she said, to say nothing of his wife. Gen. Grant sat next and defended his officer bravely. Of course Gen. Ord was not removed.

During all this visit humiliations were occurring. Mrs. Lincoln repeatedly attacked her husband in the presence of officers because of these two ladies, and I never suffered greater humiliation and pain on account of one not a near personal friend than when I saw the head of the State—the man who carried all the cares of the nation at such a crisis—subjected to this inexpressible public mortification. He bore it as Christ might have done, with an expression of pain and sadness that cut one to the heart, but with supreme calmness and dignity. He called her "mother," with his old-time plainness; he pleaded with eyes and tones, and endeavored to explain or palliate the offenses of others; till she turned on him like a tigress, and then he walked away, hiding that noble, ugly face that we might not catch the full expression of its misery.

Gen. Sherman was a witness of some of these episodes and mentioned them in his memoirs many years ago. Capt. Barnes, of the navy, was a witness and a sufferer too. Barnes had accompanied Mrs. Ord on her unfortunate ride and refused afterwards to say that the lady was to blame. Mrs. Lincoln never forgave him. A day or two afterwards he went to speak to the President on some official matter when Mrs. Lincoln and several others were present. The President's wife said something to him unusually offensive that all the company could hear. Lincoln was silent, but after a moment he went up to the young officer and taking him by the arm led him into his own cabin, to show him a map or a paper he said. He made no remark, Barnes told me, upon what had occurred. He could not rebuke his wife, but he showed his regret and his regard for the officer with a touch of what seemed to me the most exquisite breeding imaginable.

Shortly before these occurrences Mrs. Stanton had visited City Point and I chanced to ask her some question about the President's wife. "I do not visit Mrs. Lincoln," was the reply. I thought I must have been mistaken. The wife of the Secretary of War must visit the wife of the President, and I renewed my inquiry. "Understand me, sir," she repeated; "I do not go to the White House; I do not visit Mrs. Lincoln." I was not intimate with her at the time, nor indeed ever, and this remark was so extraordinary that I never forgot it, but I understood it afterwards.

Mrs. Lincoln continued her conduct towards Mrs. Grant, who strove to placate her, and then Mrs. Lincoln became more outrageous still. She once rebuked Mrs. Grant for sitting in her presence. "How dare you be seated," she said, "until I invite you!" Altogether it was a hateful experience at that tremendous crisis in the nation's history, for all this was just before the army started on its last campaign.

But the war ended and the President and Mrs. Lincoln had returned to Washington when Gen. Grant arrived from Appomattox, bringing Mrs. Grant with him. Two nights afterwards both Gen. and Mrs. Grant, and the Secretary of War and Mrs. Stanton, were invited to accompany the President and Mrs. Lincoln to the play. No answer had yet been sent when Mrs. Stanton called on Mrs. Grant to inquire if she meant to be one of the party. "For," said Mrs. Stanton, "unless you accept the invitation, I shall refuse. I will not sit without you in the box with Mrs. Lincoln." Mrs. Grant also was tired out with what she had endured and decided not to go to the play, little dreaming of the terrible experience she was thus escaping. She determined to go that night to Burlington, in New Jersey, where her children were at school, and asked the General to accompany her. She sent a note of apology to Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Stanton also declined the invitation. They may both thus have saved their husbands' lives.

After the murder of the President the eccentricities of Mrs. Lincoln became more apparent than ever, and people began to wonder whether her mind had not been affected by her terrible misfor-

time. Mr. Bowers told me that she said the re-
ident's shirt, with his initials marked on them,
before she left the White House, and that learning
the linen was for sale at a shop in Pennsylvania
avenue he sent and bought it privately. She in-
gated at the Executive mansion a long while after
all arrangements should have been made for her
departure, keeping the new President out of his
proper residence. Afterward she made appeal to
public opinion and to the country for pensions and
other pecuniary aid, though there was no need for
public approbation. She went abroad doing strange
things and carrying the honored name of Abraham
Lincoln into strange and sometimes undignified
company. For she was really neglected and left in neglect
While I was Consul-General at London I learned of
her living in an obscure quarter and went to see
her. She was touched by the attention, and when
I asked her to my house—for it seemed wrong that
the widow of the man who had done so much for
us all should be ignored by any American, being
penalitive—she wrote me a note of thanks, being
then how rare such courtesies had become to her.

HER INSANITY DEMONSTRATED.

The next I heard of the poor woman was the
scandal of the courts in Chicago, when the fact
was made clear that she was insane. It was a great
relief to me to learn it, and doubtless the disclosure
of the secret which her son must have long sus-
pected—though, like the Spartan boy, he cloak-
ed his path—as to him a sort of terrible satisfaction.
It indicated his conduct; it told for him what he
had concealed; it proved him a worthy son of that
great father who also bore his fate so heroically.
The revelation not only showed these two as
noble sufferers, but redeemed the unfortunate
woman forever from the odium for which she was
not responsible. The world had known that she
seemed to do things unworthy of the wife of a widow
of the great martyr of our history; had even seemed
to blot the nation's name; but the pitiful story
of Miriam's cast and the shadow of insanity
thrown across the intelligence of Mrs. Lincoln
relieves her from reproach or blame. Instead of a
mocking figure, deserving her name and station
and coming, she, too, becomes an object of com-
miseration, not knowing the purpose of her own
words or the result of her own deeds, or perhaps
grieving in her inner intervals the very acts she
was at other times unable to control. And Lincoln
—who that reveres and loves his memory will not
respect his character more profoundly, and feel
that he has another and tenderer claim upon our
sympathy and honor, since we know that even this
cup did not pass from him. Amid the storms of
party hate and rebellious strife, and agonies—not
intentionally be it said, like those of the Cross—for
he suffered for us—thebyssos of domestic misery
was pressed to his life and he too said: "Farewell:
New York, Jan. 8.

ADAM BADEAU.

New York World.

Jan 9

What
in
Place

Phyllis Battelle

Two Faces Of Lincoln Add To Legend Of Mary Todd



NEW YORK—One night, while lying on a couch in the White House, Abraham Lincoln saw himself reflected in a mirror.

"... My face, I noticed, had two separate and distinct images," he recounted later. "The tip of the nose of one being about three inches from the tip of the other. I noticed that one of the faces was a little paler, say five shades, than the other.

"I got up and went off.

"Now and again the thing would come up and give me a little pang, as though something uncomfortable had happened.

"I never succeeded in bringing the ghost back after that.

"My wife was worried about it. She thought it was a sign that I was to be elected to a second term of office.

"The paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through the second term..."

✦ ✦ ✦

LINCOLN'S WIFE, Mary Todd—was she slightly omniscient, or, as some historians would have it, just plain mad?

After Lincoln's death, his widow claimed she was destitute, though she had inherited in excess of \$36,000 and had been given \$10,000 more by public subscription. Congress awarded her a year's presidential salary and an annual pension and, in 1875, she was found carrying \$57,000 in securities in her pocket. That's when she was declared insane.

That's what the courts said, but not all experts agree. In fact many historians, including White House authority Perry Wolff, believed that had psychiatry in the 19th century been as advanced as it is today, Mary Todd might have been considered only highly neurotic.

A psychiatrist might have talked her out of seeing "med-

iums" for obviously bad advice, would have taught her to live with the sniping abuse heaped upon her by the public, certainly could have curbed her most corruptive weakness, vain extravagance.

But psychiatry was unknown. So Mary went her reckless way. She spent many thousands of dollars on clothes for herself, putting the President deeply in debt.

The height (or depth) of her extravagance could be noted when, after her favorite son died in the White House of typhoid, she asked for "the very finest and blackest and lightest long crepe veil. I want a very, very fine black crepe, round corners and folds around."

✦ ✦ ✦

SHE WAS NOT only a wild spender herself, she spent far too much money redecorating the White House while the country was at war. Fearing her husband's anger, she asked that the bills be kept from him—but the commissioner of public buildings told Lincoln, who flared:

"I'll pay it out of my own pocket. It would stink the nostrils of the American people to have it said the President of the United States approved a bill overrunning an appropriation for flub dubs for this damned old house!"

Mary Todd not only expected charity at home, she expected

political payoffs: "The Republican politicians must pay my debts. Hundreds of them are getting immensely rich off the patronage of my husband, and it is but fair they should help me out of my embarrassment."

Fortunately, Abraham Lincoln had the greatest sense of humor of any man who has lived in the White House.

And yet, between a war and a woman, it's doubtful that in his adult lifetime he had any truly happy birthdays.

Lincoln's Wife His Worst Enemy

By ROBERT QUILLEN

By ROBERT QUILLEN

WHEN Henry Ford on the witness stand defined history as bunk, literate Americans guffawed in happy derision; yet no orthodox definition comes so near the truth.

The history taught in the schools reports apparent facts or the surmises of partisans or the legends that flatter national pride, but never the basic causes and selfish motives that shape great events.

It is now generally known that the lines of suffering in Lincoln's face did not reflect the anxieties of high office and civil war so much as the daily torture of living with Mrs. Lincoln.

But few realize that Mrs. Lincoln was unwittingly but none the less truly responsible for the President's death.

That astonishing book, "Who Was Lincoln Murdered?" does not stress the point, but it repeats well-known and well-authenticated stories and reveals documents that make the conclusion inescapable.

In the first place, it was Mrs. Lincoln's written order, still preserved, that exempted from military service and attached to the White House guards the disreputable and worthless policeman who deserted his post at Ford's theater and thus left the way clear for the President's assassin. The appointment was a mystery, for the man's unfitness for any trust was a matter of police record.

Mrs. Lincoln also was presumably responsible for the absence of General and Mrs. Grant from the President's box that fateful night.

A week or two earlier, while Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Grant were riding in a carriage to visit the battlefront, Mrs. Lincoln saw the wife of Gen. Griffin riding horseback in the President's company and made a vulgar scene, declaring loudly that she allowed no woman to see the President alone. Mrs. Grant, a refined and gentle lady, begged that the story be suppressed.

But the next day, in the presence of many officers, Mrs. Lincoln made a similar jealous attack on the wife of Gen. Ord. Mrs. Grant tried to pacify her and was insulted in her turn, Mrs. Lincoln accusing her of being ambitious to get into the White House herself.

Finally, on the day before the assassination, Mrs. Lincoln publicly snubbed Mrs. Grant by inviting the General, but not his wife, to accompany her on a drive about town.

Would any proud woman accept an invitation to appear in public with the President's wife after that?

The President had invited Grant and Mrs. Grant to sit in his box. Grant had accepted; the newspapers had announced that he would be present; and every seat in the house had been sold, for the people were eager to see the soldier-hero.

If Grant had been there, no assassin could have entered the box unchallenged and unobserved. A popular hero isn't unwatched.

The Grants took an early evening train for the North to visit their children. And thus, apparently, a jealous woman changed the course of history.

